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The metaphorical rise of
entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

The words that have come to be associated with innovative and creative business enterprises – entrepreneur, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial – have their English origins in the realm of armed conflict. However over time the terms were colonised by the commercial world with the result that by the end of the 20th century the terms have become firmly embed within the language of commerce. Yet along the way the meaning attached to the terms have become disassociated with commerce. By the start of the 21st Century the term entrepreneurial has become a metaphor, a stand in for innovation, creativity, proactivity and risk. It is argued that such a metaphor is not owned by the commercial world and instead is a figure of speech that can be used in any situation where the speaker requires a conceptual word to mean innovation, risk, proactivity and creativity.

THE METAPHORICAL RISE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

“*Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there*”¹. (Bush, 2001) With these words the President of the United States of America, G.W. Bush, affirms his administrations desire to declare war on the abstract noun, terror. The battle could escalate. Are we now to see action on the adjective, victory against the verb, and maybe movement on the metaphor? This article explores the possibility that, following Hawkes, (1972) entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial and entrepreneur have become replacements for; innovation, creativity, risk/uncertainty and proactivity. In other words entrepreneurship and the above derivatives have become a metaphor. Throughout the following article I have approached the meaning of metaphor to be a tool which is used to shape the images of the receiver (Monin and Monin 2003). In this way the metaphor could be seen as a classifier (Glucksberg, 2001). However, more appropriately for the following discussion is the view that the metaphor will be seen as way of communicating a shared meaning that has resulted in a word being used as a ‘stand in’ for a collection of concepts (Hawkes, 1972; Spivey, 1997).

The use of metaphors in contemporary life abound. From academic management studies, to popular culture and the sporting field, the metaphor lives. The metaphors within both business language and popular culture have become so overused that at times they have become clichés. For example there is the use of the well known battle motif, the tendency of some managers to refer to their staff as “troops” and the use of military language in strategic management, which was clearly illustrated in the 1989 Harvard Business Review article *Strategic Intent* (Hamel and Prahalad 1989, pp 63-76). The overuse of metaphor in business is not, however, just restricted to the management disciplines. The education arena has for example, long used the phrase ‘the blackboard jungle’. However, it is not just the jungle that serves as a popular metaphor for the high school environment. In the United States of America the high school has, for some authors become hell. More recently, the image of the high school as hell has gained a visible place in popular culture. For an example of such a hell there is the seven series, television programme *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). Not only is hell a common motif within *Buffy*, but also it would appear to be a common metaphor utilised when providing a commentary on popular culture. Take for example the

¹ Presidential address to congress 20 September 2001

article by Christine Jarvis at the University of Huddersfield who wrote the article entitled *School is Hell: Gendered fears in teenage horror*, (Jarvis 2001). On the sporting fields we hear phrases such as ‘crush’ ‘destroy’ and even ‘obliterate’ in relation to the opposing team. All this suggests that perhaps the original intent of the metaphor has lost its power to wow. Although popular media has a great deal to do with the advance of the metaphor, such images as ‘ship of state’ ‘the rat race’ and of course ‘ship of fools’ are never far away, the use of metaphor within the entrepreneurial academic press has only recently come under close scholarly scrutiny (Nicholson and Anderson 2005).

This piece sets out to explain how the concept of the *entrepreneur*, and the adjective *entrepreneurial* in particular, has become an accepted business term, and in doing so has become a metaphor for innovation, creativity, risk/uncertainty and proactivity. It will be argued that the noun *entrepreneur*, the verb *entrepreneurship*, and the adjective *entrepreneurial* have now become metaphors that can be utilised in any context and have moved beyond the narrow confines of the academic business community. Examples of how the terms have been utilised and claimed by business academics can be seen in the writing of popular articles in the field such as; Wiklund, (1999); Morris, (1998); Lumpkin and Dess, (1996). In describing such a process this article will illustrate how the entrepreneurial metaphor has been constructed. Initially it will be show that the construction has taken place firstly within the academic community of entrepreneurship scholars, before finally being seen by the wider society as a way of describing more general creative innovative and proactive pursuits in any discipline.

HISTORY

In order to give some background to the current discussion, a brief history of the definitions is given below. It is not the intention of this article to debate at length the historical definitions of entrepreneurship. However, it is intended to illustrate the development and use of the term entrepreneurship lie in the ancient history of warfare and more recently trade. In doing so it is acknowledged that it is the historical elements of entrepreneurship, which, in the 20th century have led to the construction of the term entrepreneurial orientation. In terms of activity; traders, speculators warriors and merchants have been combining the various elements of the entrepreneurial construct as described by Lumpkin and Dess (1996). Some of these are innovation, risk/uncertainty, proactivity, creativity and have been in use since the

first barter took place. The following discussion, divided into separate subsections, traces the history of how the terms entrepreneurship and particularly the term entrepreneurial, came to be associated first with commerce, and then through commerce, to be associated with the pursuit of creative or innovative products or processes beyond the commercial arena. That being said, the word entrepreneur is recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary Online as being derived from the French *entrepreneur*, meaning *agent* and the French *entreprendre*, to *undertake* (OED 2005). Further, the same publication suggests that the first use of the printed word in English appears in 1475 in *The Boke of Noblesse* by William Worcester, he writes, “that most noble centoure Publius Decius, so hardie an entreprennoure in bataile” The next example of entrepreneurship in English use is recorded in 1485 in the book *The Lyf of Charles the Grete*, by William Caxton. In that book Caxton writes the following as an example of an entrepreneur “Rychard went to fore as chyef enterprenour” (OED 2005). These two examples of the term entrepreneur, utilised by English writers in the 15th Century indicates that the term possibly had a accepted meaning in a military context long before it had migrated into the commercial field.

Such a military background has some resonance as the etymology of the word entrepreneur (also written as enterprenour or entreprennoure), according to the OED above, means ‘one who undertakes’. In the above case the undertaking was seen as a military endeavour. However, the term entrepreneur also included a manager, controller or champion. All three of these words can be seen to be employed when describing the modern entrepreneur (Nicholson and Anderson 2005). It could be argued that the military application of the word has not really left us. For example, there are instances of the entrepreneur as hero which are not hard to find (Nodoushani and Nodoushani, 1999; De Jong 1999; Watts, 2000; Russell 2004; Brennan Wall and McGowan, 2005). Although the medieval use of the term may have had wide application, a narrowing of the term began in the 18th century with economic philosophy placing entrepreneurship within the bounds of commerce and trade.

Richard Cantillon, an Irish economist writing in France, is widely acknowledged as being the first economist to mention the entrepreneur in his *Essay on the nature of commerce in general*, (said to have been written in 1732 and published in 1755) (Casson 1990; Stevenson, Roberts and Grousbeck, 1994; Kuratko and Hodgetts, 2004). The contribution made by Cantillon was then followed by J.B Say, a French economic philosopher with his book *Treatise on Political Economy*, published in 1803. Both these two writers – Cantillon and Say

– had an influence upon how entrepreneurship would be examined and defined over the next 200 years. It is from Cantillon and his ideas of the concept of entrepreneurship being bound within the world of arbitrage and trade that entrepreneurship becomes, by the close of the 19th Century, bounded and trapped within the world of commerce – yet it did not need to be. So we find that from the mid 18th century, the path leading towards entrepreneurial activity being recognised as a metaphor for innovation, creativity proactivity and risk had begun.

THE RISE OF THE BUSINESS ENTREPRENEUR

The popular contemporary image of the entrepreneur is often one of a maverick standing against the status quo and bringing new products ideas or processes to the market in the pursuit of wealth. In the 1980s this was seen in the images of Preston Tucker, (*Tucker* 1988), or Gordon Gekko in Wall Street with his line “greed is good” (*Wall Street* 1987). In the 1990s the entrepreneur was seen as a “man with a plan” and such figures as Richard Branson and Stelios haji-Ioannou are brought to mind. By the beginning of the 21st Century the entrepreneur had been known as a hero, a warrior, a maverick, a giant and a captain of industry to name only a few (Nicholson and Anderson 2005). Above all entrepreneurs, had by the beginning of the 21st Century changed in terms of image. They were no longer seen as military warriors. Instead they were perceived by the general public, as being firmly positioned within the clothing of business people. For at least one management writer they are seen as the elite of the business world (Kanter, 1989). This particular link between the entrepreneur and the business person – that is the birth of the commercial entrepreneur – grew up in the 19th Century with political economists such as Riccardo, Smith, Weber and Mill, writing about the entrepreneur as an individual in the commercial context. The individualist theme was also mirrored in 19th Century fiction from the likes of Dickens. As such, the belief in the entrepreneur as necessary tool in business was well formed by the time the writings of Schumpeter which were translated into English in the mid 1930s. So much so that by the time the mid 20th century political/economic fiction of Ayn Rand was produced, the popular image of the entrepreneur had not only been accepted as a business *person*, but the entrepreneur had become a business *owner*. A good example of this stereotype can be seen in the principal characters of *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand, 1957), and *The Fountainhead* (Rand, 1943). In New Zealand by the close of the 20th Century at least one academic writer saw entrepreneurship as being closely identified with hero worship (De Jong 1999). The popular impression of the entrepreneur had changed. The entrepreneur was no longer just a business

person or a risk taker, they were also a hero and in some cases (Rand, 1957, 1943), an outsider with a creative vision. From the middle of the 20th century the concept and the construction of the terms relating to the entrepreneur were set upon a dynamic future path.

The changing natures of both the noun, (entrepreneur) and the elements that comprise the adjective (entrepreneurial) have a basis in the economic philosophy of Schumpeter (1942), and the managerial ethnography of Selznick (1966). The influence of Schumpeter in particular, in treating entrepreneurship as a function of business innovation and creativity, has contributed a great deal towards the construction of the modern understanding of a business entrepreneur. Schumpeter in particular was instrumental in bringing the role of the entrepreneur in business creation to the forefront of United States business commentary. Until that point the treatment of the entrepreneur within business philosophy was as an economic actor who may or may not be part of an existing organisation. With the publication in 1942 of the English translation of Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism Socialism and Democracy*, discussion of entrepreneurship in the English speaking world moved from being seen as a method of arbitrage and was instead equated with individualism, something that held the *creative* individual to be an important economic tool for prosperity (Schumpeter, 1962, p. 124).

For Schumpeter one of the main platforms on which to develop such economic activity was the concept of innovation bounded by individual freedoms. It is in the United States of America that this Schumpeterian ideal has taken on a purely commercial if not a self employed aspect. For example, the authors Brockhouse (1987) and Hirsch and Peters (1995) place entrepreneurship firmly within the individualist aspect of business organisation. Birkenshaw (1999), also writing for the United States market suggests that entrepreneurial activity is involved in business start-up. Business start-up in this context has been further described by Hirsch and Peter, Brockhouse and Birkenshaw as being either a new venture or a new activity within an existing firm.

However, not all commentators agree that entrepreneurship is just the simple act of starting a venture. For example, Vesper (1990), Morris (1998) and Timmons (2004) suggest that like Schumpeter, entrepreneurship involves elements of both innovation and creativity. For these writers it is not only important for entrepreneurship to be located within the business environment but also that entrepreneurship must at some point include the elements of

innovation and creativity. As suggested above, acceptance of these two concepts, that is innovation and creativity, within the entrepreneurship literature owes its history to Schumpeter. It is through the inclusion of innovation and creativity as the foundations of entrepreneurship that has enabled the construction of entrepreneurial orientation.

It is the construction of entrepreneurial orientation, with its elements of innovation, creativity, proactivity and risk/uncertainty (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996, Wiklund 1999, Wiklund and Shepherd, 2005), more so than the construction of the concept of the individual entrepreneur, that has contributed to the eventual construction of what I have termed the entrepreneurial metaphor. It is now widely accepted within the entrepreneurship literature that entrepreneurial orientation or the adjective entrepreneurial encompasses all four elements listed above. As the elements of innovation, creativity, risk, proactivity uncertainty, are not exclusively business terms, the metaphor – entrepreneurship – equally does not necessarily refer to an exclusively business activity as the following passages will illustrate.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE METAPHOR – ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Although there may be general agreement that the entrepreneurial orientation is constructed through the combination of innovation, risk, proactivity, and creativity; not all authors are in agreement that it should follow that entrepreneurship falls outside the business context. However, such a belief does not necessarily preclude the suggested construction of the metaphor as the elements that comprise the metaphor are not elements that are only restricted to business. For example Hisrich and Peters (1995), utilising entrepreneurship as a noun, contend that innovation creativity and risk are all involved in the act of entrepreneurship. Further, they also argue that such activity can take place within an existing organisation or in the process of launching a new venture. Regardless of whether the activity is an external or internal event, to be entrepreneurial is to call upon the factors that combine to form the metaphor of entrepreneurship. Hisrich and Peters are not alone in this assumption. Since the publication of the article *Clarifying the entrepreneurial orientation construct and linking it to performance* (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996), entrepreneurship scholars have increasingly turned their attention away from the individual and more toward the elements that have led to the construction of what is now termed entrepreneurial orientation.

Lumpkin and Dess were by no means the first to couple entrepreneurship with innovation and risk. They did however provide a useful framework for others in the field to follow. Before Lumpkin and Dess consolidated the work on entrepreneurial orientation, authors such as Kirzner (1973) Casson, (1990) and even Schumpeter (1942) had suggested that entrepreneurship involves risk, innovation, proactivity and creativity. Israel Kirzner for example writes that the entrepreneur “identifies opportunities and analyses them” (1973, p 34). He goes on to say that the actions of an Entrepreneur are “creative, and proactive not reactive and mechanical” (Kirzner, 1973, p 34). The contribution that Lumpkin and Dess have made was to combine the various approaches to entrepreneurship and illustrate how, when bundled together, these aspects construct what has become known as the ‘entrepreneurial orientation’.

More recent literature in the field provides further reinforcement for the construction of the entrepreneurial metaphor. Li Hong and Gibbions (1997) attribute the entrepreneurialism of Sony to having a culture that involves risk innovation creativity and proactivity. Similarly Thompson, (1999) suggested that entrepreneurship involves creativity and innovation. Morris and Jones (1999) in their article on public sector management, acknowledge that entrepreneurship involves creativity, risk, and innovation. Finally Wiklund and Shepard (2005) and Nicholson and Anderson (2005) both contribute articles to the on-going literature concerning the entrepreneurial construct being comprised of innovation risk/uncertainty, creativity, and proactivity.

In reviewing the above, an argument can be presented that shows how the construct known as entrepreneurship can be seen as a metaphor – a form of conceptual representation (Glucksberg, 2001, p 4). In this case the metaphor is a conceptual representation of the four elements described in the above sections. The elements of the metaphor are not business terms, but can be used in any context. In that regard the metaphor is not necessarily a business term. It is after all only a conceptual representation of innovation, risk/uncertainty, creativity and proactivity.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE METAPHOR – ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The previous two sections outlined the more dominant understanding commentators within the entrepreneurial field hold regarding the definition of the terms entrepreneurial,

entrepreneurship and entrepreneur. The first section of this article briefly outlined the emergence of the noun entrepreneur. The second section, above, then broadly outlined the emergence of what has been termed by previous writers as a construct. This construct is based upon the combination of risk/uncertainty, innovation, creativity and proactivity. When combined, these three or four concepts have been constructed by the previous authors into both the verb entrepreneurship and the adjective entrepreneurial.

The following discussion aims to bring the two previous sections of this article together by suggesting that the construction of the terms entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial and entrepreneur can be seen as a metaphor for innovation, risk/uncertainty, proactivity and creativity. In doing so it is not intended to *define* the construct of entrepreneurship, but rather posit the view that the construct can be *interpreted* as a metaphor. In this respect the current discussion aims to add to, rather than replace, the on-going debates regarding the definitional aspects of the entrepreneurial construct. The major distinction that this discussion makes is rather than applying metaphors *for* entrepreneurship, as highlighted in recent work by Nicholson and Anderson (2005), it is intended to suggest the entrepreneurial construct can be seen *as* a metaphor itself. As the meaning attached to entrepreneurship itself is comprised of differing elements, which has created a complex construct, a metaphor is an ideal figure of speech that can be used as a “stand in” for reality. The metaphor in this case entrepreneurship, has over time become a replacement for the collection of well-known and well accepted meanings (Hawkes 1972).

Upon reflection, based on the previously outlined discussion regarding the terms entrepreneur, entrepreneurial and entrepreneurship it can be illustrated that there is an agreement among the writers outlined above, that there is a commonality regarding the elements of the construct entrepreneurship. This commonality rests on the acceptance that the accepted noun, verb and adjective used in entrepreneurial literature involves the elements of risk/uncertainty, proactivity, creativity and innovation. Writing in the *Academy of Management Review* in early 2005, Ferraro, Pfeffer and Sutton suggest that meaning is conditioned through accepted norms. Further, that continued use of those accepted norms indicates social acceptance of the meaning of those norms which in turn give rise to accepted conceptual use. (Ferraro, Pfeffer and Sutton, 2005) By relating the views of Ferraro *et al* and the views of the authors cited in the above sections, it can be illustrated that the noun, verb and adjective commonly used in the entrepreneurial literature can be seen as a metaphor.

The entrepreneurial construct relates to a bundle of known, accepted and understood meanings. In this way the entrepreneurial construct conforms to the figure of speech known as a metaphor. That is device that not only clarifies concepts but one in which is used in attempt to define meaning for the user (Hawkes,1972; Inns and Jones, 1996; Brummett, 2003; Ferraro, Pfeffer and Sutton, 2005).

In leading to the conclusion of this article, it will be illustrated that groups of words have been used to clarify, not *define*, the concept of entrepreneurship. For example Wiklund and Shepherd, writing in the *Journal of Small Business Venturing* 2005 illustrate how entrepreneurial orientation can be seen as innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk taking, resulting in the tendency to engage in and support new ideas and creative processes (p. 75). Clearly there is a connection between entrepreneurialism and the elements of risk, innovation, creativity and innovation. Such a view is not however a new idea. Krizner also suggests that entrepreneurship is a creative process which involves proactivity and innovation but not necessarily for profit, (Krizner 1973).

The noun, verb and adjective of entrepreneurship can be described as a metaphor, based on the notion that it describes a collection of themes. Those themes, outlined above, have in turn been accepted as a way of describing the entrepreneur, or the entrepreneurial process. It is such acceptance that entrepreneurship involves innovation, creativity, risk/uncertainty and proactivity that has enabled the construction of a popular and academic understanding of entrepreneurship. However additional support for the argument that entrepreneurship be viewed as a metaphor can also be provided on the basis that it is *shared* understanding and social acceptance that has given meaning to the metaphor. Although, as described above, the metaphor has in the past been seen only as a linguistic tool (Cornelissen 2005), it can also be seen as a means by which people organise their thoughts in order that they may describe their perceptions of complex constructs (Spivey, 1996). Both Cornelissen and Spivey, in putting forward this viewpoint of the metaphor, would appear to be developing the argument of Hawkes, (1977); Grant and Oswick, (1996); Inns and Jones, (1996) and Mangham, (1996). All of whom have described the metaphor, not only as a linguistic tool, but also, and more importantly for the current argument, as a way of organising and clarifying concepts. In other words they see the metaphor as a way of organising and clarifying concepts. To paraphrase Hawkes, the metaphor is a replacement of meaning used to give meaning to groups of words that have been arrived at through accepted use (Hawkes ,1977, p 1). Thus,

when business academics write of entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial or entrepreneurship, it is acceptable to assume that they are addressing aspects of innovation, creativity, risk/uncertainty and proactivity.

A CONCLUSION

Throughout the 20th century in particular, the words associated with entrepreneur and entrepreneurship have become closely associated with business activity. However, as illustrated above, the concepts that are explained by the metaphor – entrepreneurship – are not exclusive business terms. I suggest there is a danger in accepting that entrepreneurship is seen only a business term. The concepts that comprise the entrepreneurship metaphor can be found in a wide variety of endeavours. In the process of attempting to define entrepreneurship, successive commentators have, in effect, given the world a metaphor for creative undertakings in any field.

With the exception of trademarks, copyright and registered devices, no person or group of people ‘own’ words, or their meaning. However words, collections of words and their associated meaning are sometimes considered owned by various communities. Take for example the words entrepreneur, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial. These words have, by association been owned by business practitioners and the academic business community. However, as illustrated throughout the above discussion those three terms have become so closely identified with the meanings associated with innovation, risk, creativity and proactivity that over time those component parts have been implied within the three above words. That is the words entrepreneurship entrepreneurial and entrepreneur can be understood as a ‘stand in’ for the four components parts of their make up. In this respect entrepreneurship and its derivatives has become a metaphor.

Once the word entrepreneurship, or entrepreneurial is seen as a metaphor, a conceptual representation, it is no longer owned by the business community. Instead it sits in space waiting to be utilised by anyone who needs to explain the complex combination of concepts that make up entrepreneurial activity. Viewing the entrepreneurial construct in such a way simplifies its usage. It is no longer necessary to place prefixes such as social, environmental, non profit in front of the word entrepreneur. Indeed it is not necessary to utilise the term intrapreneur when writing of entrepreneurship within an organisation. It is becoming

understood, although not yet in full bloom, that when a writer uses any of the entrepreneurial words, they are meaning to suggest that the person, activity, or entity they are referring to is; innovative, creative, proactive and is operating within an environment of risk and or uncertainty.

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